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Can We Talk?

Leaks are to Washington as cars are to Detroit. "Unauthorized disclosures" are the capital's chief commodity, and recently the city has had to cope with a surplus. Before the Senate Intelligence Committee managed to finish its probe of the Iran-*contra* affair last month, several versions of its report got into circulation prematurely. Minnesota's David Durenberger, the ranking Republican, even slipped the findings to Ronald Reagan; word of that indiscretion also leaked, provoking a minor uproar.

The new Senate Select Committee probing Iranscam is determined to avoid such unseemliness. To shield its investigation from political gossip as well as foreign intelligence services, the committee will move into a new \$350,000 suite in the Hart Office Building that is designed to be leakproof. Staff members will talk on bug-proof telephones, type on hacker-proof word processors and sign out research material from a "secure documents room." The offices will be protected by code-

locked doors staffed around the clock by armed guards. Exterior walls will be implanted with electronic sensors to detect intruders.

The National Security Agency will sweep the site for bugs before construction begins later this month. The committee will take the additional precaution of discussing sensitive matters inside a top-secret "bubble," a conference room constructed of steel panels impervious to external listening devices. The human factor has been secured as well: staff members will soon sign a mandatory "nondisclosure oath" promising to stay mum.

The new digs will allow the Senate investigators to review the hundreds of electronic intercepts, CIA files and covert-operation reports that may bear on the widening arms-for-hostages scandal. But one committee member wryly suggests that the extensive security precautions may be the best guarantee that information will get out. If Washington runs on leaks, says Alabama Democrat Howell Heflin, secrecy fuels the process. "You have to build all these top-secret, eyes-only bubbles in order that there can be leakin'," Heflin insists. "That's what it comes down to."



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